

To be a friend of Israel demands no less than supporting her through these very difficult days, as well as the better ones we all know await her, and await her people in the future. And despite decades of terror in the holy cradle of faith, we must hope, as did a fifteen year-old girl hiding in Amsterdam writing in her diary less than a month before she was taken to Auschwitz, "I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too shall end, that peace and tranquility will return once more."

You know Ladies and Gentlemen, through God's grace, the friendship of the United States and Israel will endure to see the dreams of that little girl fill the whole world with light and truth forever.

INTRODUCTION OF H.R. 1715, TO
ENHANCE VA'S AUTHORITY TO
RECOVER COSTS OF MEDICAL
CARE

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 2003

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, along with Mr. EVANS of Illinois, the Committee's Ranking Member, I am introducing a bill to strengthen the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA's) rights under law to recover the costs of providing medical care to veterans and other persons from certain third parties. A number of public health plans either refuse to reimburse VA, or are prohibited from doing so by current law. This bill would correct this problem by eliminating barriers to reimbursement for VA care. It is identical to a bill I introduced in the 107th Congress, H.R. 5530. That bill was referred exclusively to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

H.R. 1715 is based upon the simple principle that acknowledges when VA provides medical care to an insured or Medicare-eligible veteran, VA should receive payment for the services it provides. This principle is not new. Since 1986, VA has had statutory authority to collect from traditional insurers such as Blue Cross-Blue Shield, Aetna, Mutual of Omaha and many others. These funds are used by VA to supplement appropriated funds to maintain high quality health care. VA also collects from so called "Medi-gap policies" that are an important adjunct to the Medicare program.

But VA is unable to collect from the massive managed care sector, accounting now for over two-thirds of all health plans in the United States, including the managed care plans within Federal Employee Health Benefits Plan. Nor can VA collect from the Medicare program. RAND Corporation has estimated that over 2 million Medicare-eligible veterans were enrolled in VA health care in fiscal year 2000, with that number increasing each fiscal year since then.

My legislation would require these federal programs to pay VA for care it provides to covered beneficiaries. This would increase the amount of money VA could collect by hundreds of millions of dollars each year—providing funds that are desperately needed to reduce these intolerable waiting lists and promote better use of all available health care resources.

This legislation will not limit the choices available to veterans in Medicare or any other

federal health care plan, and I do believe it will create a modest incentive for veterans to remain enrolled in the VA rather than move back and forth between systems as they do now. This bill will also provide an important supplement to the VA health care system for the services it renders in caring for many of our nation's heroes.

I urge my colleagues to support this common-sense approach to improving veterans' health care, reducing waiting times for VA health care, and helping Medicare-eligible and other federally insured veterans gain better health care coverage from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

TRIBUTE TO THE FOREIGN
AGRICULTURAL SERVICE

HON. BOB GOODLATTE

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 2003

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, today Congressman STENHOLM and I are introducing a resolution recognizing the important service of the Foreign Agricultural Service of the Department of Agriculture on the occasion of its 50th anniversary. USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service was established to develop and expand markets for United States agricultural commodities and products.

Our farmers and ranchers are the most productive in the world and produce much more than we in the United States can consume. Therefore a vibrant export market is very important to the success of United States agriculture. FAS has contributed to that success and as of 2002, United States agricultural exports exceed imports by more than \$12 billion. Our exports have grown significantly over the history of FAS and now exceed \$50 billion per year.

FAS fosters the public and private partnership that is needed to promote United States agricultural exports and to develop and expand markets around the world.

At this important time when free trade negotiations are ongoing, both in the World Trade Organization and through bilateral negotiations, the FAS is essential to represent United States agriculture and ensure that the challenges facing our agriculture producers are thoroughly addressed.

Another responsibility of the FAS is to provide food aid to needy people in developing countries and to help those countries to eventually become trading partners of the United States and buy our agricultural products.

The FAS and its employees provide a significant service to the farmers and ranchers here at home so that they can compete in worldwide markets. I congratulate them on their achievements and look forward to working closely with the FAS as the Committee continues its work to expand markets for United States agriculture.

NATIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH WEEK

HON. EDOLPHUS TOWNS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 2003

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in honor of National Public Health Week. I want to thank

the organizers and sponsors of events around the nation that serve to raise everyone's awareness of the need to improve public health, particularly in the area of the nation's obesity crisis. Those groups include the American Public Health Association, American Dietetic Association, Pfizer Inc., Association of American Medical Colleges, Association of Teachers of Preventive Medicine, Research!America, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

One of the greatest public health challenges facing our Nation today is curbing obesity, which has increased at such unprecedented levels that health professionals are calling obesity a national epidemic. Spurred by sedentary lifestyles and unhealthy diets, about 60 percent of American adults are overweight and 15 percent of children and teenagers are overweight. The percentage of overweight adolescents has tripled during the last twenty years.

Although I am pleased that the numbers in my home state are slightly better, the percentage of the population that is obese is still troubling. What is even more troubling is the research that indicates that obesity is an even greater problem among the African-American and Latino communities.

The health consequences of obesity are real and significant. Being overweight is associated with increased risk for heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. About 300,000 deaths each year are associated with being obese. In fact, people who are overweight have a 50 to 100 percent increased risk of premature death. As the American Public Health Association stated in their release, "reversing this life threatening trend has moved beyond a matter of personal responsibility to a national crisis that all Americans must respond to."

Unfortunately, we are moving in the wrong direction. Less than ten percent of children walk or ride their bicycles to school and more schools are inviting fast food vendors into their cafeterias. We need to make a concerted effort to increase physical fitness activities among the entire population, especially children, and encourage all Americans to adopt a healthier diet that includes fruits and vegetables. I applaud the work of all of the organizations that are spreading this message during National Public Health Week. However, if we are going to be successful in reducing obesity, we must make sure that this message is heard the entire year and not just for one week.

That is why I will soon reintroduce my bill, the Medicaid Obesity Treatment Act. I hope to work with all of the sponsors involved with National Public Health Week to ensure passage of my bill in this Congress.

RECOGNIZING THE "FROM SEA TO
SHINING SEA: A CELEBRATION
OF MARINE SANCTUARIES" EX-
HIBIT AT MOTE MARINE LAB-
ORATORY, SARASOTA, FLORIDA

HON. KATHERINE HARRIS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 2003

Ms. HARRIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the extraordinary work of the National Marine Sanctuaries Foundation, as exemplified by an exhibit entitled "From Sea to

Shining Sea: A Celebration of Marine Sanctuaries," which is currently on display in my District at the Mote Marine Laboratory in Sarasota, Florida. Due to the generous support of the National Marine Sanctuaries Foundation's Board of Directors and contributors, "From Sea to Shining Sea" is traveling the country, taking the wonders of our nation's thirteen underwater marine sanctuaries to communities from coast to coast.

The National Marine Sanctuaries Foundation was established in 2000 to support the education and outreach activities of the National Marine Sanctuaries Program, which Congress created in 1972 through the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act. Congress passed the Act in 1972 in response to growing awareness nationwide of the intrinsic environmental and cultural value of our coastal waters. This legislation has led to the designation of thirteen unique marine areas as National Marine Sanctuaries, which has ensured the conservation of these natural treasures through comprehensive resource management, education, and research.

As they provide a secure habitat for wildlife as well as a preservation zone for shipwrecks and prehistoric artifacts, our national marine sanctuaries serve as natural classrooms and laboratories. For example, as a result of the establishment of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary in November 1990, my home state is assured of the continued protection of a marine ecosystem that contains the largest coral reef in the continental United States as well as one of the most diverse assemblages of underwater plants and animals in North America.

"From Sea to Shining Sea" features an original painting by renowned artist Robert Lyn Nelson, as well as touch screen, interactive, DVD video and exhibits that introduce visitors to all twelve national marine sanctuaries. This stunning exhibit will continue on display at the Mote Marine Laboratory through May 31, 2003.

Founded in 1955, Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium is a long time partner with the NOAA and the National Marine Sanctuary Program. Mote Aquarium educates and entertains almost 400,000 visitors per year, bringing the wonders of the marine world to visitors of all ages. Mote's Center for Tropical Research, located in Summerland Key, studies the coral reefs, other habitats, fauna and flora of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

Mr. Speaker, I am especially proud to recognize artist Robert Lyn Nelson for his amazing contribution to this exhibit; Office of National Marine Sanctuaries Director Dan Basta, for his vision and dedication to our country's marine treasures; Ms. Lori Arguelles of the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation for leading the public outreach effort; Superintendent Billy Causey of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary; Aquarium Director Dan Bebak; Mote Marine Laboratory Executive Director Dr. Kumar Mahadevan; and Mote Marine Laboratory Board of Trustees for their continued dedication to excellence in marine science, education and conservation.

TRIBUTE TO ARMY STAFF
SERGEANT JERRY CORTINAS

HON. SOLOMON P. ORTIZ

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 2003

Mr. ORTIZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Army Staff Sergeant Jerry Cortinas, born in Brownsville, who was badly wounded in Afghanistan fighting for the cause of freedom from tyranny, and ridding that nation of the infestation of al Qaeda forces that hijacked it for their evil purposes.

His uncle, Santiago Torres of Brownsville, says Jerry always wanted to do something important in his life. Now he has. He was already in National Guard at age 19 when he wanted to join the Customs Bureau like his uncle, but he was too young. So he just went and volunteered for the Army.

Jerry is an excellent soldier, a fact apparent to those who fought with him and who have known him since he returned.

He joined the Army's elite Special Forces and made his mark on the first defining war of the 21st Century with the Special Forces. After extensive training in the United States, he departed for Afghanistan.

Jerry was in a terrible accident in Afghanistan. During a drill with RPGs, rocket propelled grenades, one of them exploded, killing one soldier and causing painful damage to Jerry's body. He lost one of his hands, and has had extensive facial damage.

Jerry was in Walter Reed Army Hospital from December until February. He has since been transferred back to Ft. Bragg for rehabilitation. Like the good soldier he is, he wants to recover and remain in military.

He is a good young man who cares for his country and believes his contribution is important to our Nation.

I ask my colleagues to remember Jerry as he continues with his difficult struggle with a long rehabilitation. Please also remember his wife, Celina, and their two-year-old daughter, Dion, who are in Fayetteville, NC.

INTRODUCTION OF H.R. 1718, TO
REPEAL TERMS SPECIFIED BY
LAW FOR CERTAIN VA OFFI-
CIALS

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 2003

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I am introducing a bill to repeal the four-year terms specified by law for certain officials of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and to add a provision that addresses the appointment of directors of principal geographic service areas.

Fourteen years ago, when the Veterans Administration was established as an executive department and redesignated the Department of Veterans Affairs, Public Law 100-527 also established a Chief Medical Director (CMD), a Chief Benefits Director (CBD) and a Director of the National Cemetery Services (the Director). The CMD and the CBD were to be appointed by the President, with the advice and consent of the Senate, while the Director was to report to the Office of the Secretary.

Subsequent laws further restated and reorganized the three key executive positions in the Department as the Under Secretaries for Health, Benefits and Memorial Affairs. Under current law, the Under Secretaries for Health and Benefits are appointed for four-year terms, with reappointment permissible for successive-like periods. There is no such restriction or term provision established in law for the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs.

I am introducing H.R. 1718 to repeal term appointments for the Under Secretaries for Health and Benefits. This bill will align all three Under Secretary positions as Presidential appointments, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, and allow the President maximum flexibility in the appointment of these primary executive positions. Current incumbents would not be affected by the enactment of this legislation. The President would also be required to notify Congress concerning the reasons for removal if the President should choose to terminate or remove one of the Under Secretaries of the Department.

These term appointments likewise would be repealed for key officials assigned to the Office of the Under Secretary for Health, who are appointed by the Secretary subject to reassignment at the Secretary's discretion. With this bill, the designation of directors of principal geographic service areas are added to the group of key agency officials appointed by the Secretary and serving at the Secretary's discretion without term restrictions.

As with the three under secretaries, H.R. 1718 requires that the Secretary notify the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House and Senate when one of these key officials is removed from one of these subsidiary positions. These officials may be entitled to reassignment, if they held a previous career position within the Department.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation would allow the President and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs maximum flexibility to hold senior officials accountable and to align the agency's top leadership with the vision and goals of the Secretary and the Administration. I urge prompt House action on this important measure.

VETERANS BENEFITS

HON. SUSAN A. DAVIS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 2003

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, our nation's veterans have fought to protect our freedoms and the way of life we cherish. Unfortunately, when their service is done and they retire, our military personnel are too often excluded from the American Dream they fought to preserve.

We all know that military pay does not compare to private sector wages. After retirement, thousands of veterans cannot afford to purchase a home because their military pensions do not cover the cost of a mortgage payment.

Because of this inequity, the Veterans Administration instituted a home loan program to assist veterans achieve the dream of home ownership. While this is a commendable program, the maximum loan amount is often not enough to purchase a home—particularly in regions with high real-estate markets.